

## Curriculum-based Learning — Museum Style

by Stephanie Yuill

Conserving, preserving and protecting: words near and dear to the hearts of biologists and historians, a way of life for ecologists and curators. Yet in the past, rarely did the two paths cross. Natural heritage practitioners focussed on biodiversity while cultural heritage folks zeroed in on artifacts and their provenance.

Fortunately, this way of thinking is rapidly disappearing. From the World Conservation Union to front-line practitioners, there is increasing recognition of the interaction between nature and people, and a growing integration of environmental and social issues.

This also rings true for natural and cultural heritage educators as the line between nature and culture education slowly blurs. Ten years ago, a bat program might have concentrated on echolocation. Today, such a program might revolve around mosquitoes, humans and the role of bats in preventing the spread of West Nile virus.

### The Flip Side of the Coin

Some readers may have experience in both the natural and cultural heritage sectors. For others, the world of museums, archives and galleries may seem like another planet. I am fortunate to have instructed on both sides of the heritage coin and my goal is to better acquaint you with the world of curriculum-based cultural heritage education.

As educators, we are bound by a number of common threads beyond our passion for the topic. The following is from an e-mail entitled "You May Be a Museum Professional If . . . ." Yet, it is remarkably easy to substitute the title for "You May Be an Outdoor Educator If . . . ."

- You tell your kids to use the back door and you've accidentally called it the school group entrance.

- To you, "Grant" isn't just some guy's first name.
- The idea of directional signage being designed with 1-inch medium grey letters on a light grey background makes sense to you.
- Without thinking, you put a colon in every title. Recipes: Relatives' Reflections; Susie's Lunch: A Bagged Buffet; To Do: The Undone Retrospective.

### The [Curriculum] Ties That Bind Us

Perhaps the biggest tie linking natural and cultural heritage educators is the provincial curriculum. From September to June our work lives revolve around rubrics, exemplars and programming. We ask and answer questions and we revel when comprehension steals across students' faces. The school year has begun and for many educators, so has the madness.

Museums, archives and galleries have a wide variety of grades and subjects they link with their programming. For many, this is their bread and butter. Some sites see literally thousands of students during the school year compared to hundreds of visitors during the summer months. From a financial standpoint, the more curriculum-based programs the higher the revenue. And in this climate of budget reductions and government program cuts, revenue is important.

### It's All in the Timing

Programs themselves run from one hour, to one day, to one day and night. The Markham Museum in Markham for example, runs a 60-minute preschool program on pioneer life exploring how people travelled before cars.

In northern Ontario, the Red Lake Museum offers a multitude of one-day programs including a grade five program on the role of

Aboriginal peoples in the fur trade and a grade eight program on how treaties were made and the affects they had on Aboriginal peoples.

Upper Canada Village in Morrisburg offers an incredible 22-hour Village Overnight Live-In Adventure for grades three to eight. Students wear 1860's clothing, participate in various hand-on activities, assist with farm chores and attend a one-room schoolhouse. The living accommodations are in two historical residences that are, fortunately for the students, outfitted with a modern kitchen and washrooms.

### The Cost of Doing Business

Most museums charge on a per student basis depending on program length. On average, the price is approximately \$2.00 per hour per student but each site also has artifacts, staff and other related expenditures to take into consideration when pricing a school program.

While program fees seem reasonable, it is often transportation to and from the site that makes the experience cost prohibitive. Chartering a 48-seat school bus in Toronto costs \$177 for in-city travel; the \$1.61 per kilometre charge for travel outside the city limits increases the cost substantially.

In response to shrinking funds and increasing costs, many sites are reaching out to schools by offering in-class visits. The Dufferin County Museum and Archives produces road shows: one-hour presentations by educators in the classroom. Programs are interactive, hands-on and adaptable to all grade levels. My favourite is the Immigrant Trunk, where students examine why the trunk is a specific size, what the new settlers brought in it and why they brought what they did. An ingenious marketing strategy, the Museum also offers a complimentary day pass to the Museum and Archives so that each participating student can continue to explore his or her community history.

*Education kits* are another way museums are reaching out to students. Kits, which are crates

containing artifacts, student activity cards and other learning materials, are available for rent from participating sites. As the St. Catharines Museum quotes, "It's like getting your own museum expert in a box!"

Costs are generally pre-determined depending on rental period. The museum in St. Catharines charges \$35.00 for ten days. Their two program kits, "Let's Pretend We're Pioneers" and "Medieval Life," contain lesson plans and student activities suitable for full-class participation.

Some larger facilities are taking a two-pronged approach. The Royal Ontario Museum, for example, rents out two different-sized kits. The larger school cases provide objects/artifacts, resource and reference materials, and student activity cards. While cases can be rented for as little as two weeks, teachers can rent them for the entire school year for \$375. Smaller resource boxes can be used by teachers to highlight specific points of a topic or by students for small group work and independent study. These boxes are available for two-, four- and twelve-week periods or the entire school year (\$230.00).

### Connecting the Curriculum

So what do museums, archives and galleries do for outdoor experiential education programming? How do they tie into the provincial curriculum? History is just one of the core subjects museums draw from. Music, visual arts, drama and dance, and language can all be integrated into programming in conjunction with key curriculum areas. For example, while developing a grade two Traditions and Celebrations program, word searches and crossword puzzles can be developed to fulfill the writing component of language.

Science and technology can be also found in museum programming. Some sites have natural areas where they do environmental education and sometimes the twinning of cultural and natural heritage simply fits. A

favourite program of mine was Two Hundred Years of Recycling, created for a grade five Conservation of Energy class. The premise was that, out of necessity, pioneers reduced, reused and recycled and today's generations can learn energy conservation from these early environmental practices.

There are some recurring subject areas found within the cultural heritage sector. The table

below provides an overview of the grades, strands, subjects and related topics commonly found in museum programming.

## The Fun Stuff

Like environmental education, programming in museums can be fun, exciting and terribly amusing. I once 'taught' in a one-room schoolhouse at Muskoka Heritage Place in

Subject	Strand	Grade	Related Topic(s)
Civics		10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informed Citizenship</li> <li>• Purposeful Citizenship</li> <li>• Active Citizenship</li> </ul>
Geography		9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Human–Environment Interaction</li> </ul>
History		7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New France</li> <li>• British North America</li> <li>• Conflict and Change</li> </ul>
		8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Confederation</li> <li>• Canada: A Changing Society</li> </ul>
	Canadian History since World War I	10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communities: Local, National and Global</li> <li>• Change and Continuity</li> <li>• Citizenship and Heritage</li> <li>• Social, Economic and Political Structures</li> <li>• Methods of Historical Inquiry and Communications</li> </ul>
		11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canadian History and Politics Since 1945</li> </ul>
		12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canada: History, Identity and Culture</li> </ul>
Native Studies		9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expressing Aboriginal Cultures</li> </ul>
		10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aboriginal Peoples in Canada</li> </ul>
Politics		11	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canadian Politics and Citizenship</li> </ul>
Social Studies	Heritage and Citizenship	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationships, Rule and Responsibilities</li> </ul>
		2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traditions and Celebrations</li> </ul>
		3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early Settlements in Upper Canada</li> </ul>
		6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Nations People and European Explorers</li> </ul>
	Canada and World Connections	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Local Community</li> </ul>
		3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban and Rural Communities</li> </ul>
		4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canada's Provinces, Territories and Regions</li> </ul>
		5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aspects of Citizenship and Government in Canada</li> </ul>

Huntsville. While instructing on the Union Jack, I would ask students to read a passage from a primer explaining how the flag was a combination of the flags from England (St. George), Ireland (St. Patrick) and Scotland (St. Andrew). Many an unknowing student read out loud that the flag was composed of standards from *Street George*, *Street Patrick* and *Street Scotland*.

Indeed, it's typically the students' responses that make a program memorable. At Eildon Hall Memorial Museum in Sutton we played an artifact identification game as part of a grade three Early Settlement in Canada program. Items included a bed warmer, curling iron and snuffbox. But it was a 19<sup>th</sup> century tea box with accompanying lock and key that stumped students the most. As a hint, I would tell them it stored something so important it had to be locked up at all times. Guesses of what it housed included jewellery and keys but by far the most guessed was alcohol!

Beth Sinyard at the Elman Campbell Museum in Newmarket runs a terrific grade two Traditions and Celebrations program called "Cards, Candies and Celebrations: Holidays in Victorian Newmarket."

When asked how pioneers cooked, she reports at least one student invariably answers, "With a microwave." When we ask how pioneers travelled in the winter, one response is usually, "Snowmobile." The candle snuffer becomes a candle sniffer, a chamber pot a soup bowl. As to what qualifies as winter vegetables, in these days of superstores, students' replies often include lettuce and watermelon.

## Finally

As the world changes and transforms, so too does education. Today's educators are challenged by increasing multiculturalism, exponentially advancing technology and a multitude of changing climates (political, social, economic and environmental).



Museum and environmental educators are not exempt from this evolution. Increasingly, we are recognizing the ties between humans and the world around us.

In 1753 Voltaire stated that Canada is, "a country covered with snows [sic] and ices [sic] eight months of the year. . . ." An embellishment? Perhaps. Yet it illustrates the profound impact the weather and climate had on early explorers and settlers. They were forced to meet the elements head on and this in turn shaped the pioneer experience.

Conversely, awareness of the human impact on the climate is just now approaching its zenith. We now recognize that our actions have actually shaped and changed the climate. As educators, we can help tackle these issues in part by increasingly incorporating human-environment interactions into programming.

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